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‘WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BE’

Women defy the Catholic hierarchy to become priests

Story by Jonathan Bullington | Photos by Eileen T. Meslar | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

ST. LOUIS — The entire day had been building to this moment. First there was the procession, then the readings and songs and the sponsors who explained why they felt she was ready for what was to come.

She prostrated before the altar inside the old church, her chest heaving with emotion as the Litany of the Saints was said. She sat in a folding chair, tears trickling down her cheeks, while each person in the pews came forward to place their hands on her head in a quiet blessing.

And as the noon hour arrived and Anna Girresch — Annie to those who know her — held out her hands to be anointed with oil, it felt like all 70-plus people in attendance collectively held their breaths as the ritual neared its culmination.

It came seconds later, when a bishop raised Annie’s right hand toward the ceiling and, “with great joy,” introduced her as a newly ordained Catholic priest.

The congregation — Annie’s parents and sisters, nephews and friends and 12 other women whose ranks she joined that last Saturday in June — stood and cheered for a full minute.

No one seemed bothered that they had just been willing participants in a ceremony the Roman Catholic Church deems a grave sin, or that Annie had just incurred one of its most severe punishments: automatic and immediate excommunication.

“I’m just filled with the spirit right now and so

Above: Annie Girresch, center, receives a kiss from her mentor, Elsie McGrath, on the day Girresch joined McGrath as an ordained Catholic priest. The ceremony was held at St. John’s United Church of Christ in St. Louis on June 27.

blessed that she’s going to go forth and share God with all the people that she touches,” her father, Wil Girresch, said between thanking people who stopped to congratulate him.

“This is what the church needs to be,” added his wife, Ellen Girresch. “Accepting. Supporting.”

Annie is the latest in a line of women, some 300 in all, scattered across the United States and in at least nine other countries, who in the last two decades have defied the Catholic Church to be ordained as deacons, priests and bishops.

These women — cradle Catholics and converts, former nuns, teachers, hospice chaplains, coun-

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ELECTION 2026

Dems face competing demands if they win

The party split on how hard to fight Trump if control of Congress flips

By Daniel C. Vock
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WASHINGTON — Illinois Democrats may be savoring the possibility their party could retake the U.S. House, and possibly the Senate, after next month’s elections, but the state’s likely incoming and returning lawmakers are split on how aggressively to use that power against Republican President Donald Trump.

If Democrats win back power in the Nov. 3 midterms in a year when experts and polling predict a blue wave of Democratic victories in congressional races, they still will face competing demands on their time and attention.

They could tackle the economic issues that have dragged down Trump’s popularity in recent months, but they would need Republican support to get those measures to the president’s desk and signed into law.

Or they could reassert Congress’ power and try to thwart many of Trump’s unilateral actions, which would alienate Republicans and likely anger the president.

All of that will play out as the term-limited Trump approaches lame-duck status and Democrats lay the groundwork to retake the White House in 2028.

“Congress is designed to operate on two parallel paths: The oversight track and the legislative track. We need to do both,” said U.S. Rep. Brad Schneider, who represents Chicago’s north suburbs and chairs the New Democrat Coalition, a caucus of more than 100 moderate Democratic House members.

“Irrespective of who wins the majority, it’s imperative that we restore checks and balances to our government,” he told the Tribune. “Those checks and balances have been weakened before the Trump administration, and the Trump

See **ELECTION** on Page A4

Raids came home ‘when it happened to Jose’

Voters wrestle with support of Trump immigration policies — until it ensnares someone they know

By Gregory Royal Pratt
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

PARIS, Ill. — In his dreams, Jose Fiscal Belli is still living an all-American life with his all-American family.

Each day, he comes home to his wife, a hazel-eyed, small-town preacher’s daughter. Together, they raise four children and run the Main Street Cafe, where they serve country fried chicken and eggs to a feisty bunch of regulars. He also co-owns a Mexican restaurant just across the state line in Clinton, Indiana.

Everyone knows Jose in Paris, Illinois, located about 165 miles south of Chicago. He coaches Little League. Police officers ask for his help as a volunteer Spanish translator. He is known to donate whole meals to the local soup kitchen. When 8-year old Crosby Allen needed a new bat but didn’t have the money, Jose gave him one.

He fits right into the mostly white town of roughly 8,000 people where a laundromat offers free laundry day for those who can’t afford it and a local group builds wheelchair ramps for disabled residents.

But Jose, 32, is not in Paris anymore. Instead of living the American Dream, he wakes up to a nightmare in ICE custody. He was picked up earlier this summer after Indiana State Police stopped him outside a government building in Indianapolis where he had parked in the wrong spot. The officers turned him over to federal immigration agents, and he is being detained at the Oldham County Jail in La Grange, Kentucky, where he faces deportation.

Now, a town that voted overwhelmingly for President Donald Trump is contending with Jose’s absence. The Prairie Press, a local

See **JOSE** on Page A6



Courtney Fiscal Belli gets a hug from her son, Legend Fiscal Belli, 4, at the restaurant she runs with her husband, Main Street Cafe, on Oct. 9 in downstate Paris. Fiscal Belli’s husband, Jose, was detained by federal agents in Indianapolis in July. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**



Bears look to bounce back from loss

The Bears haven’t let bad losses multiply under head coach Ben Johnson. That makes Sunday’s game against the Falcons significant. **Sports**

Trump’s Russia move irks Congress

Lawmakers from both parties blasted the president’s decision to waive sanctions on Russia days before they were to start. **Nation & World, Page B5**

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Enjoy Europe’s edible specialties via picnics



As a budget traveler, there's no better experience than a picnic sourced from a local market and then eaten outdoors with a lively square, peaceful park, or rejuvenated harborfront as a backdrop. Picnicking is simply the best way to enjoy Europe's edible specialties economically. You'll eat better while spending less than half as much as those who eat exclusively in restaurants.

I've become a picnic connoisseur — and markets are at the heart of my picnic plans. To me, the market-places of Europe are as rewarding as the museums. They're local life on display, and the energy is palpable. Purveyors shout their daily specials — cheeses, meats, fresh produce and warm-from-the-oven bread — while shoppers zigzag from stand to stand. Nearly every town has a market, and I make it a point to be there for the action.

Here are my tips for navigating them, assembling your picnic like a pro, and enjoying your ad-hoc meal to the fullest.

First, get some useful supplies. When you arrive in Europe, buy a good knife with a can opener and corkscrew. In addition to being a handy plate, fan, and lousy Frisbee, a plastic lid makes an easy-to-clean cutting board. Resealable plastic baggies (large and small) are great for containing messy food and packing up leftovers. A reusable cup, spoon and fork can come in handy for picnics — but also, eating takeout meals. I pack a tiny tablecloth to spread out my meal with a touch of class.

At the market, start with bread. A good loaf serves as a foundation for your picnic. Bread has always been cheap in Europe —



Proper site selection can make the difference between just another meal and an unforgettable picnic. **TRAVIS PARKER**

leaders have learned from history that when stomachs rumble, so do the mobs in the streets — and is a tasty, easy vehicle for another market forte: cheese. Nearly everywhere in Europe has its local cheese specialty; follow your nose and ask the monger for guidance.

Then move on to meats and fish. Take the opportunity to try something unfamiliar. Cultural chameleons eat better. If you're in Spain, ask the vendor which cured sausage they recommend ... if you're in southwest France, go for the foie gras — it's local and spreads easily on your crusty baguette. In Norway, invest in a tube of shrimp paste.

If you're buying fruit and veggies, make sure they are

in season. Don't shy away from sales: In Europe, cheap produce doesn't mean "this is going bad soon" — just the opposite. European purveyors want you to eat what's freshest and best, and incentivize it with lower prices. Load up your basket with what's inexpensive and plentiful.

You'll probably need to hit several stalls to put together a complete meal. Make an effort to communicate with the merchants, so you know what you are buying and what you are spending. Whether you understand the prices or not, act like you do and you're more likely to be treated fairly. Observe the weighing process closely, and use your hands to confi-

dently show how thick you want your pâté sliced. If you don't know the local language, just point to the food you want and write the amount on a scrap of paper or type it into your phone's translation app.

It also helps to learn the measurements. Most of Europe uses the kilogram: One kilo (kg) has 1,000 grams (g or gr) — and equals roughly 2.2 pounds. One hundred grams (a common unit of sale) of cheese or meat tucked into a chunk of French bread gives you about a quarter-pounder.

Don't forget drinks. There are plenty of cheap, quality ways to wash down a picnic. If you're tired of filling your water bottle, you can buy drinks in any super-

market or corner grocery store. Liter bottles of soda are inexpensive, as is beer in most countries — and local wine gives your picnic a nice touch. Most neighborhood wine shops will even open your bottle if you forgot your corkscrew.

Basket loaded with goodies, it's now time to think about where you'll enjoy your feast. Proper site selection can make the difference between just another meal and le pique-nique extraordinaire. Since you've decided to skip the restaurant, it's up to you to create the atmosphere.

Some of my all-time best picnics have been enjoyed on a castle wall ... accompanied by a commanding view, the setting sun

and medieval fantasies in the quiet of after-hours Europe. When I'm exploring the Alps, I punctuate my hike with a picnic. Food tastes even better high on an Alpine ridge. And if you head to any nearby park or riverbank, you're likely to run into locals who had the same great idea as you. With any luck, your well-assembled picnic could become a potluck, resulting in new friends as well as stuffed stomachs.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Artist taps into sound of various cultures

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

Born in Honduras and raised in that Central American country, as well as the United States, Thailand and Puerto Rico, musician Lily Vakili said hearing so many different genres of music set the tone for what she wanted to do with her own music.

“Coming from a multicultural background, I grew up accustomed to listening to music from all over,” Vakili said in an interview from her home in Montclair, New Jersey. “Blues, folk and rock of the U.S., the Afro-Caribbean sounds of salsa and merengue in the Caribbean and the toback percussion of Persian music. All of it has inspired my work. As I continue to travel, especially on tour, I seek out other musicians and listen to their way of making music. It's truly a privilege to learn from other artists.”

This interview with Vakili has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: What do you remember about your first professional gig?

A: It was a solo gig, just me and my acoustic guitar playing a house concert. I was excited and very nervous. I remember feeling I couldn't hear my voice. I've since learned it just takes practice to learn how to hear your voice. I never looked back.

Q: Have you worked on any songs while you were on the road?

A: Absolutely. Being on the road is a true source of inspiration for me. There's just so much time to observe and to be in your



Lily Vakili seeks out other artists while traveling to hear their way of making music. **BILL HEUBERGER**

own head without a lot of distractions. I love it. When I come back from tour, I always have new material to work with.

Q: Do you have any free time built into your tours to enjoy the city you're in?

A: I definitely love to get out and explore wherever I find myself. One of my favorite jaunts was to the Parthenon in Nashville (Tennessee), where I paid the necessary tribute to the great golden goddess Athena! If you haven't been, you must. It is spectacular.

Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?

A: Well, let's just say there are quite a few. I love old-school theaters with carved and gilded prosceniums, big velvet curtains, chandeliers ... like the phenomenal Kings Theatre in (New York City's) Brooklyn or the Williams Center in Rutherford, New Jersey. There are still a few throughout the country like that. I'd love to do a tour of restored concert halls. A girl can and should dream.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?

A: Puerto Rico, because I grew up there and I miss its people, language, poetry, art, music, cuisine, the sun and mountains and beaches. It has my heart and always will.

Q: What untapped destination should people know about?

A: The Sternberg Museum of Natural History in Hays, Kansas. Trust me, go. It inspired my album “Oceans of Kansas,” and if you go, you'll find out why.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?

A: When my family lived in Bangkok, Thailand, I remember going to the beach for a holiday as a very small child and being knocked over by the waves. Turns out I laughed, got back up and ran back toward them. Story of my life.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?

A: Perspective and awe at the goodness inherent in most people. That and patience, because sometimes things really don't go your way, and you just gotta deal with it and keep a good attitude about it. You can always scream into your pillow at night. (Laughs.)

Q: What are your five favorite cities?

A: I can't answer that! But any big city is a source of amazing adventure for me, be it Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Nashville, Newark or New York.

Q: When you go away, what are some of your must-have items?

A: Moleskine notebooks, pencils, pens, a camera and headphones.

For more from the reporter, visit www.jaehakim.com.

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Holland America cites pricing error in canceling couple's booked cruise

By Christopher Elliott | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

My husband and I are loyal Holland America customers. Since we live in South Florida, we often look for last-minute deals. A few months ago, I saw a 10-day cruise on the Zuiderdam posted on its website. The prices were changing as I watched, but I managed to book an ocean-view room for \$479 per person. The total came to \$958.

We applied a \$200 cruise credit and paid the remaining \$758 in full. I received an email confirmation showing that our booking was paid. Three days later, I received a new confirmation from Holland, indicating that we now owed an additional \$1,530. I immediately called our personal cruise consultant, who was unhelpful. She told me the original price was a pricing error. When I asked to speak with a supervisor, she refused.

I followed the advice on your site and emailed guest relations managers. I even sent screenshots of the pricing I saw online. Holland wouldn't budge. We felt like this was a bait-and-switch. We ended up canceling for a full refund because we weren't going to pay double the price. But we really wanted to take this cruise. Is there any way Holland can be held to the original price it advertised and accepted?

— Cindy Woodring, in Coral Springs, Florida

A: Holland should have honored the price it published on its website.

When a company displays a price, accepts your payment and sends a “paid in full” confirmation, it should be a done deal. The only exception is when the company made an obvious error — for example, moving a decimal point and charging \$9.58 instead of \$958. The cruise line pointed to Section 2 of its cruise contract, which it says lets it off the hook for pricing errors. I didn't see anything in Section 2 about pricing errors, but in several places on its site, Holland gives itself the right to cancel a cruise for any “lawful” reason.

In supplemental pricing terms, the company says, “Holland America Line reserves the right not to honor any published prices that it determines were erroneous due to printing, electronic or clerical error. Holland America Line shall have the right to refuse or cancel any bookings made at an incorrect price, whether or not the order

has been confirmed and your credit card charged.” But was this an obvious error? I think \$47 a day on a luxury cruise with all meals included is too good to be true. But for a last-minute deal during the off-season? Maybe not.

You did the right thing by taking screenshots and keeping a paper trail. You also tried to escalate the issue within the company. When a front-line agent refuses to let you talk to a supervisor, it's time to stop calling and start writing. You can find the names and email addresses of the Holland executives on my advocacy site, Elliott.org.

I reached out to Holland on your behalf. “We regret that a pricing error briefly appeared for this voyage and apologize for the confusion this caused,” a representative told me. “Once the issue was identified, we promptly notified affected agents and guests.” Holland says it won't honor the incorrect fare, but it has offered complimentary stateroom upgrades to anyone who chooses to

continue with their voyage. This “goodwill” upgrade required you to pay the \$1,530 first.

This is disappointing, especially considering your loyalty status. When a cruise line makes a mistake on its website, it should own it — not ask its best customers to pay for the glitch. Next time, consider keeping your booking while you escalate your complaint to the executives. Once you hit “cancel,” your leverage disappears faster than the shrimp buffet on formal night.

I'm writing this column as a public service for the rest of us. I'm not happy about the resolution, but now you know: Even if you paid for everything, your cruise line can withdraw its offer and ask you to pay more.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.